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February 11, 2009

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Ravalli County Commissioners

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Ravalli County Commissioners
215 South 4th Street
Hamilton, MT 59840

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for taking the time to thoughtfully consider the safety initiative for the Ravalli County airfield.

As a private, general aviation pilot it may seem that my only concern is for my personal safety and the safety of fellow pilots and their passengers. While this is certainly very important, it appears to me that, after attending the February 4th meeting that the ICAARE people are attempting to shift the center of attention from safety to an entirely different issue. I ask that the commissioners ignore this red herring and focus on the intent of the FAA's approach.

While the ICAARE group seems to be very passionate about their wish to keep the valley from growing, this should not be the issue. This very small, vocal collection of retired residents appears to have one concern: airplanes flying over their homes. At least one of them has repeatedly said he would like to have the airfield closed permanently. This individual moved here from California after years of research of the valley, its residents, their culture and its real estate. He bought a property two miles from the runway, knowing full well he would hear airplanes taking off and landing. Now he says his quality of life is threatened.

Another of the group wants to compare the Hailey, Idaho situation to Ravalli's. Hailey's airport supports commercial flights. It has a 7,000-foot runway. Suggesting that we would have to eventually move the airfield (as some have encouraged regarding Hailey) if the runway is improved is ludicrous – there is no comparison. Sun Valley is a resort. They encourage thousands of people to fly there commercially and subsidize the airlines to get them to do so.

No comment is necessary regarding Ms. Bookbinder's presentation. She may be the best, if unintentional, advocate for the proposed airfield improvements. As for Mr. Depauw, while he is apparently well versed in the details of the Environmental Assessment, his arrogance and treatment of the Commission's FAA guest as well as Morrison-Maierle's

representative was an embarrassment for our community. His closing remarks, in which he asked how many of the proponents own jets and then said why would we care if we don't own a jet is exactly the point. We are not trying to make the airfield a jetport. We are trying to make it safe for general aviation and to maintain FAA financial support so that the county doesn't have to pick up the tab.

The one issue that has been too lightly addressed is the economic impact of our airfield. As an example, the three companies of which I am a principal employ over 200 valley residents when at our peak. Thirty seven percent of our sales have resulted from people who have visited Hamilton via our airfield. Most of those people arrived in non-jet propelled aircraft. Our single largest sale was to a gentleman from Lincoln, Nebraska who purchased well over \$1,200,000 worth of Bitterroot products after flying in here solo in a single engine, piston airplane. These are the types of clients who help our company inject tens of millions of dollars into the local economy.

As you are well aware, the FAA simply wants our airfield to be safe. They also wish that we would have the foresight to allow for potential further improvement within the next twenty years. For the Commission to provide for the valley's future it merely needs to follow the FAA recommendations – bring the current 4,200-foot runway into compliance and provide room for it to be enlarged if the need presents itself.

To forgo a \$20,000,000 investment of federal funds, to give up FAA future financial support, and to jeopardize the already tenuous business vibrancy of our valley to appease a minute segment of Ravalli County's residents would be a tremendous disservice to the vast majority.

Thank you again for your consideration. Should you have questions or wish further discussion, you can reach me at 375-1819 or at moreland@rmlh.com.

Sincerely,



Mark Moreland